

# **Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources**

## **News Release**

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### **Getting the Word-Out: How to Identify and Control Giant Hogweed and Poison Ivy in Massachusetts**

The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources is trying to get the word-out on identifying and controlling certain poisonous plants such as Giant Hogweed and Poison Ivy. Giant Hogweed is a noxious or poisonous weed, and skin exposed to its sap will become temporarily but severely sensitive to sunlight. This will result in burns, blisters and occasional scarring in the area affected. Poison ivy, in contrast, causes an allergic reaction and a person must first be sensitive to the plants oils before a skin reaction will occur.

It is important to emphasize these differences when describing the hazards posed by these plants. "Whereas some people are not "sensitized" to poison ivy, anyone whose skin is exposed to the sap of Giant Hogweed is affected" says Steven Antunes-Kenyon, of the Department's Division of Regulatory Services.

Confusion also exists when trying to distinguish these plants from others that often "look-alike" and grow next to them. Individuals from dozens of Massachusetts communities have called reporting plants that resemble Giant Hogweed. However, to-date, locations of Giant Hogweed have been confirmed only in the communities of Andover, Blandford, Boston, Easthampton, Granville, Groton, Huntington, Southwick, Sutton, Turners Falls, Wakefield, Westfield, West Springfield, and most recently this year-Gill.

When Giant Hogweed was first identified in Granville by Al Carl, Program Coordinator and Plant Inspector, a surge of calls flooded the Department. Many people suddenly became suspicious of commonly found large plants that are native to the Commonwealth. Plants such as Cow Parsnip, Angelica, wild lettuce, and even Queen Anne's Lace or wild carrot are still mistaken for the large majestic but noxious Giant Hogweed.

According to Julie Callahan, Educator from the University of Massachusetts, Extension Agriculture and Landscape Program, mature Giant Hogweed has the following distinctive features:

- Grows 9-15 feet in height

- Stems are 2-4 inches in diameter, hollow, ridged, and covered with coarse hairs and dark reddish-purple patches
- Largest leaves may be 5-feet in width
- Flowers grow in large white flat-topped clusters that may reach 2 ½ feet in width

“The Giant Hogweed plants are in full-bloom right now,” says Carl. Communities in western Massachusetts, such as Granville, have the most impressive stands of the plants thus far.

To help resolve the Giant Hogweed identification confusion, the Department has organized a Hogweed-Hotline and printed a brochure with pictures and descriptions that can be mailed to anyone with concerns. For those with internet-access the Department’s website has numerous photos for identifying Giant Hogweed as well as online reporting of sites.

“We check the Hogweed Hotline and online reporting system daily,” states Trevor Battle, with the Department’s Regulatory Services. “We respond to all the calls and emails; however, only those with high credibility warrant a visit by the Department’s plant inspectors.”

“While we want and encourage reporting of all Giant Hogweed sites, we do not have the resources for plant inspectors to visit every site especially when the description is a much better match for Queen Anne’s Lace or Angelica rather than Giant Hogweed” explains Brad Mitchell, Director of Regulatory Services.

In contrast, poison ivy is a native and common poisonous plant in Massachusetts. Confusion is expected regarding the invasive noxious Giant Hogweed. But why are so many folks still jumping right into the poison ivy patch or pulling down that poison ivy vine only to be rewarded with the characteristic itchy, red, skin rashes? “Look-alike” plants for poison ivy also exist. Plants such as the Virginia creeper and common brambles or certain wild berry plants can look very similar to poison ivy at first glance. “If you see the thorns, than you know it’s not poison ivy” says Callahan. “It’s a bramble.”

“Controlling these plants can be a challenge for the property owner” says Carl. “A property owner in Wakefield treated his Giant Hogweed plants with Round-Up last year and reported that they grew back even larger this year.”

According to Carl, some of the most commonly used herbicides sold in “Ready-to-Use” formulations may not be very effective in controlling Giant Hogweed. “Evidence to date suggests that following the pesticide label directions on more concentrated herbicide products, will prove more effective in controlling the Giant Hogweed; however, follow-up in subsequent years may still be necessary.”

For additional information, contact the Department of Agricultural Resources as follows:

- Giant Hogweed Hotline: (617) 626-1779
- <http://www.state.ma.us/dfa/pestalert/index.htm>